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A Fitting End to 'The Year of the Spy'

An 11th American is charged with espionage

The KGB has not yet run help-wanted ads on U.S. matchbook covers ("Make Big Money Selling Secrets to the Soviets"), but the lure is clearly there. As The Year of the Spy drew to a close, another seemingly ordinary citizen stood before a federal magistrate last week, accused of trying to sell classified documents to Moscow. Randy Miles Jeffries—the 11th American to be arrested on espionage charges in 1985—is a seemingly minor catch compared to others, just a lowly messenger for a Washington stenographic service. But the FBI claims that Jeffries stole 200 pages of highly classified congressional testimony from his employer—including a top-secret discussion of the Pentagon's communications arrangements for nuclear war—and offered them to the Soviet Union for $5,000.

Private contractors are required to dispose of classified materials by shredding or burning them. But the FBI said that some employees at the Acme Reporting Co., where Jeffries worked, simply tore secret documents in half and placed them in plastic trash bags. Jeffries allegedly kept copies of three confidential hearings of the House Armed Services Committee he was supposed to throw away. FBI agents testified Jeffries showed his swag to a co-worker and said he "needed to find a Russian to sell the documents to."

The government claimed that Jeffries called the Soviet Military Office in Washington on Dec. 14—a call apparently monitored by the FBI. Minutes later, government agents said, they spotted Jeffries entering the Soviet building. Jeffries allegedly called the Soviets three days later, demanding to know if a decision had been made. This second call apparently triggered a classic sting operation. On Dec. 20, an FBI agent calling himself Vladimir met Jeffries in a downtown hotel room and told him that Moscow had approved the deal. At that meeting, Jeffries allegedly claimed to have already handed over 54 pages of classified testimony to the Soviets. He was arrested as he left the hotel room—on his way, authorities say, to retrieve the other documents.

Federal magistrate Jean Dwyer originally called the government's case against Jeffries "about as thin . . . as it has been my misfortune to see in recent years." Even after the FBI produced additional evidence, Dwyer complained, "Frankly, I don't see that the case has gained very much weight." Nonetheless, she reluctantly ordered Jeffries held without bond.

The Jeffries case was a pointed reminder of the vulnerability of the government's unwieldy security apparatus. The Pentagon alone produces 16 million classified documents each year. Nearly 5 million Americans in government, industry and academia hold some form of security clearance—so many that even security officials admit it's impossible to police them all.

Tightening up: Confronted by the Jeffries case, Congress displayed a belated eagerness to tighten its own handling of classified documents. The House launched a review of its security procedures, and may end up eliminating the use of outside stenographic services to record closed-door hearings. Vermont Democrat Patrick Leahy, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, proposed the creation of a special cadre of well-screened stenographers. But he stressed that the answer to the far broader problem lies in the government's classifying much less and thereby sharply reducing the number of people given access to the secrets that *really* need protection.

The administration, meanwhile, is still in disarray over its controversial effort to mandate random polygraph tests for government officials with top clearances. The Washington Post reported that the president was unaware of the implications of the polygraph order that he originally signed. That sweeping directive was scaled down after a loud public dissent from Secretary of State George Shultz—and the White House denied reports that Shultz himself was in jeopardy over the flap.

WALTER SHAPIRO *with* KIM WILLENSON *and* SYLVESTER MONROE *in Washington*

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